The Europeanization of Slovak Political Parties: the Case of Smer – Social Democracy, the Slovak National Party and Most-Híd

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Abstract: *Europeanization is an ongoing process influencing various aspects of member states' political systems including political parties. Based on Ladrech's approach to analysis of Europeanization of political parties, this article examines the impact of Europeanization on three Slovak political parties which are members of the government coalition formed after the elections of 2016, notably Smer – Social Democracy, the Slovak National Party and Most-Híd. The article is conceived as a comparative analysis involving three different subjects focusing on the patterns of Europeanization within five areas defined by Ladrech including program changes, organizational changes within parties, patterns of party competition, party vs. government relations and party relations beyond the national level.*

Key words: *Europeanization, Political Parties, Slovakia, SMER – Social Democracy, Slovak National Party, Most-Híd, the European Union*

Introduction

This article deals with the Europeanization of three Slovak political parties present within the Slovak Parliament — *Národná rada Slovenskej republiky*, which created a government coalition after the 2016 elections, notably: Smer — Social Democracy

(*SMER — sociálna demokracia; SMER-SD*), the Slovak National party (*Slovenská národná strana; SNS*) and Most-Híd (*MOST-HÍD polgári part — občianská strana; Most-Híd*). The current government coalition represents an interesting combination for analysis as it is made up of a social-democratic party, a strongly nationally oriented right-wing party, and a right-wing party specifically representing the rights of minorities in Slovakia. The government of each member country largely determines the direction of European integration as its members make decisions on adoption of European legislation in the Council of the European Union and ratify numerous EU documents and treaties. Their consistency on European issues should be strong, as inconsistency in key questions could trigger a rise in Euroscepticism within society. The extraordinary connection between current Slovak political parties is therefore an interesting object of research from the point of view of scholars focused on Europeanization.

SMER-SD initially profiled itself as a central political party with a declared Euro-Atlantic orientation since its inaugural Assembly. It later merged with several left-wing parties and shifted its values to the left side of the spectrum. It gradually became the only left-wing party in the Slovak party system. In its revised statutes (SMER-SD Statutes 2016), the party proclaims democratic values, solidarity, social justice, and also refers to the main program priorities of the Party of European Socialists and the Socialist International. SMER-SD is an interesting subject of research since it has been participating in the government since 2006 with a short break in 2010–2012.

SNS is, in contrast, a nationally oriented political party established back in 1990. Since its establishment, it has been in the position of a 'Slovak protector,' either in the former common state with the Czechs or later in the European structures. The party statutes of 2016 state that it intends to defend and protect the sovereignty of the Slovak Republic, to strengthen patriotism as well as to strengthen the national identity of Slovaks (SNS Statutes 2016). During the period when the party was led by Ján Slota, relations between Slovakia and Hungary as well as between Slovakia and the EU grew worse. The EU viewed SNS as an extremist party and criticized SMER for forming a coalition with it (Stanley 2010). The new chairman Andrej Danko, however, fundamentally changed his rhetoric, and at present the party may be considered a traditional right-wing party that defends the national principle in particular which has also an impact on Europeanization.

The third analysed subject is the center-right-wing party Most-Híd founded in 2009. The party is built on democratic values, highlighting in particular cooperation. Its name symbolizes the effort to build a bridge between the majority Slovak ethnicity on the one hand and the Hungarian and other minorities living in Slovakia on the other (Gyarfasova 2010). The founder of the party Béla Bugár has emphasised, however, that Most-Híd is not ethnic based, but stresses the civilian principle and thus targets a broad spectrum of voters. Moreover, the party is associated with

liberal values (Hlaváč 2016) and its program priorities, written in the statutes, include tolerance, guaranteeing the peaceful co-existence of all Slovak citizens, as well as European cooperation (see the Most-Híd Statutes 2009). Since its establishment the party has been presented as pro-European.

In certain aspects the article builds up and extends previous research by Dušan Leška (2015) who has dealt with the same topic. Due to the rather retrospective assessment of Europeanization, Leška's article is a good starting point for identification of patterns within Europeanization among Slovak political parties and for further assessment. The present article, however, is more deeply focused on three bodies in relation to 2016 elections rather than providing a comprehensive but shallow overview of Europeanization patterns. Moreover, this article uses interviews with party experts on the EU which hopefully adds increased value to the assessment. Nevertheless, similarly to Leška's article, we make use of Ladrech's approach towards Europeanization of political parties published in the Living Reviews in European Governance (2009) which structured the focus into five areas: Programmatic change, Organizational change, Patterns of party competition, Party-Government relations and Relations beyond the national party system.

The article is divided into five parts, each of them dealing with one area as presented by Ladrech (Ladrech 2009: 8–9). The first part deals with *Programmatic change*: aimed at a quantitative or qualitative analysis of the parties' programmatic documents towards the EU or its agenda. The second part is dedicated to *Organizational change*, aimed at research on changes in the internal organizational structure of the party including EU agenda related posts. The third part deals with the *Patterns of party competition*, aimed at changes in party identity, position and competition parties vis-á-vis other parties within the party system. The fourth part is about *Party-Government relations*, where the party presence in the government may influence existing EU attitudes due to the exposition and responsibility for the EU related agenda. Moreover, the party also acquires a new role as a mediator between government policy and the opposition which may influence the official attitude towards the EU agenda. The fifth part is about *Relations beyond the national party system*, where national political parties are not isolated as they cooperate with other parties and are part of international party organizations and party families. In this sense international organization and European party families influence national parties in terms of norms, values and standards and in another way how national parties influence the international level. The main aim of this article is to demonstrate how the three above-mentioned parties stand within these three areas.

This article contributes to the study of Slovak Political parties and repeatedly verifies trends indicated in previous research carried out by Leška (2015). There are several other articles which deal with Europeanization of party politics in Slovakia. Regarding Slovakia, previous research has also been made by E. Harris (2004) and

Karen Henderson (Henderson 2006, 2009), however, the articles written by the above-mentioned authors are at least 10 years old which is quite a long time for the development of political parties in relation to Europeanization.

Europeanization of political parties in Central and Eastern European EU member states is increasingly popular among scholars in the last decade (Lewis and Mansfeldová 2006, Ishiyama 2006, Walecki 2007, Ladrech 2008, Lewis 2008; Whitefield and Rohrschneider 2009). In the Czech Republic, Europeanization of Political space was research subject of Michael Baun, Jakub Dürr, Dan Marek and Pavel Šaradín (2006) especially in relation to upcoming EU enlargement, or by Lukáš Linek and Zdenka Mansfeldová (2006); and Vít Hloušek and Pavel Pšeja (2009). Some of the latest articles are dedicated to party program manifestos (Kovář 2014, 2015). Europeanization was researched in Poland, for example, by Radoslaw Markowski (2006) or Anna Pacześniak (2014, 2015). A comparative analysis of Czech and Polish parties in relation to Europeanization and Euroscepticism has been written by Søren Rishøj (2004). The issue was also with dealt in other Baltic States (Sikk 2006, Ikstens 2006, Duvold and Jurkynas 2006). Political parties in Hungary in terms of Europeanization were dealt with by Zsolt Enyedi (2006). There is also existing research about Slovenia (Krašovec, Lajh and Kustec-Lipicer 2006, Krašovec and Lajh 2009, Krašovec and Deželan 2015) and other post-Yugoslav countries (Fing-Hafner 2008, Mikucka-Wójtowicz 2017). Vladimir Vučković carried out an analysis, for example, on Europeanization of political parties in Montenegro (Vučković 2017). There is existing research in Bulgaria and Romania (Stoyanov 2006, Grecu 2006). Agnieszka Cianciara wrote about Europeanization as a legitimation strategy of political parties in the case of Ukraine and Georgia (Cianciara2016). Europeanization (respectively de-Europeanization) is also the case of Turkish political parties (Gümrükçü and Başkan 2015, Wódka 2015, 2016). In summary, research about Europeanization of political parties matters and is extending very quickly.

The above review of the existing research reveals that Europeanization research related to parties has become a well established area among scholars and although it might seem that the topic has been covered, there is still some space for new findings. First, the research is from a qualitative perspective not equally aimed at all five areas demarcated by Robert Laderch. Second, the exiting literature needs an update as new elections have taken place and the intensity and scope of Europeanization changes with transformation of internal and external political forces. In other words, Europeanization is an ongoing process and research can provide us with a rather temporary or retrospective picture of the Europeanization effects. Third, a detailed knowledge of political system and the arena in which political parties operates helps to add new aspects to the Europeanization research which might be hidden to foreign authors. For the above-mentioned reasons, it is of value to build on existing research and check the validity of the previous findings in the new political reality.

We are working with the term Europeanization in this article. There are many ways of understanding the term Europeanization and thus dozens of definitions varying according to the field of social science. Moreover, they vary in terms of complexity, from very general definitions to specific and detailed definitions. In the field of European studies, definitions have been developed by 'classics' such as Robert Laderch, Thomas Risse, Tanja Börzel, Claudio Radaelli, Johan P. Olsen and others. One of the earliest definitions was developed by Robert Ladrech who understand Europeanization as:

> "an incremental process reorienting the direction and shape of politics to the degree that EC political and economic dynamics become part of the organizational logic of national politics and policy-making" (Ladrech 1994: 69).

His definition serves as a general perception and gives some idea about the process of Europeanization and its content and to a great degree is also in line with EC influence on political parties.

Another definition is provided, for example, by Claudio Radaelli (2004) who claims that:

> "Europeanization consists of processes of a) construction, b) diffusion and c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, 'ways of doing things' and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the EU policy process and then incorporated in the logic of domestic (national and subnational) discourse, political structures and public policies" (Radaelli 2004: 5).

From the Radaelli perspective, political parties may be exactly those 'political structures' influenced by this process as their structures have to be adapted to new forms of cooperation with other parties in Europe, adopting stances to public policies dealt at the EU level and reflecting domestic discourse about EU affairs.

It is not, however, the main aim of this article to provide a detailed and comprehensive definition. There are five main understandings of the Europeanization concept which have been summarized by Johan P. Olsen (2002): Europeanization may be considered: (1) Changes in external boundaries as the European Union expands through enlargement; or (2) it may refer to developing institutions at the European level which highlights the center-building process; (3) it may refer to central penetration of national systems of governance as national and sub-national systems are exposed to EU wide norms; (4) it may refer to exporting forms of political organization beyond the European territory mainly as a consequence of EU trade policies and requirements for access to the EU market and (5) it may be linked to the political unification project (Olsen 2002: 923–924). It can be argued that all five different understandings of the notion of Europeanization are linked to political parties to a certain degree. First, EU enlargement is a politicized issue and political parties must

take a stance on it. Second, national parties developed an appropriate structure at the EU or European level as they are parts of ideological families. Third, parties are influenced by common rules and standards and; fourth, they have to adopt a certain attitude towards the EU unification process on a scale between unlimited pro-EU support to radical Euroscepticism. There is an affinity from these premises to the concept defined by Robert Ladrech (2009).

1. Programmatic change

This section summarizes the examination of the four electoral programs of the governmental parties for the parliamentary elections that took place after joining the European Union in 2004. The initial elections took place in 2006. All the party manifestos have been examined by quantitative analysis methods which revealed the exact number of coherent statements related to EU institutions, policies, documents, or programs within pre-selected policy areas. These areas were the economy, social policy, agriculture, foreign policy, regional policy, the environment, education and health. All of these statements were subsequently categorized as positive (+), neutral (0) or negative (–) attitudes towards European integration on the basis of the content encoding methodology.[1]

In recent years there have been several programs of SMER. The 2006 election program can be perceived as clearly pro-European, as no single negative EU statement was identified. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that the overall percentage of EU related statements was relatively low — it was only 9.4 % of all the statements. They have the largest representation in the area of foreign policy. From the overall program rhetoric of SMER towards the EU, it can be stated that it is proclaiming the values of the party. The introductory sentence of the program refers to party membership in transnational party-based European structures and also positively underlines and supports the membership of the Slovak Republic in the political and economic structures of the EU (SMER-SD Program 2006). A large percentage of European statements are focused on the positive impact of European funds. On the other hand, it points to the importance of increasing transparency in this matter. SMER-SD mentions spending of EU funds in one third of all EU-related statements, which is a relatively high figure and it can be argued that this is the most significant topic in the party rhetoric towards the EU (SMER-SD Program 2006).

The electoral programs of the SMER-SD party for the 2010 and 2012 elections are almost two identical documents as regards content. The explanation may be that the 2012 elections were early elections and the party did not have enough time to create a new document. In any case, both documents evidence a significant shift towards greater coverage of European issues and themes. In this sense both docu-

ments may be considered a significant shift. This is underlined by the existence of a separate chapter dealing with the EU. Similarly to the previous document, no negative European statement has been identified in the 2010 and 2012 election programs. We can deduce that this is a consequence of SMER-SD's participation in the government in 2006–2010, when the party occupied several major ministries. This helped the party consolidate its Euro-Atlantic orientation. An important milestone in the program is the setting of the objective of raising public awareness about the EU and its functioning. Most of the statements related to the EU in both programs include a chapter on foreign policy focused on EU membership. SMER-SD highlights, for example, the interest in implementing the Treaty of Lisbon, involving the Slovak Republic in the formation of the European External Action Service, and the support of the Eastern Partnership (SMER-SD 2010). In the 2012 program the chapter dealing with the EU is ranked second while it was last in the previous program. This can be assessed as a further shift of the SMER-SD towards pro-European positions. The party is convinced that EU membership ensures a sense of security for the country and its citizens. It also states that the EU allows Slovakia to participate directly in international decision processes that affect the living conditions of Slovaks (SMER-SD 2012). Thus, both programs can be clearly assessed as pro-European, with an average of 19 % positive European statements.

The SMER-SD election program of 2016 cannot be understood as a proper manifesto as it is just a short document containing ten program priorities. The party did not therefore come up with any comprehensive program, and consequently the documents cannot be compared properly. The program cannot be divided into policy areas for the purposes of comparative analysis (INES 2016). It therefore contains only one assertion of the EU in terms of using the euro funds (SMER-SD 2016).

Contrary to SMER-SD, all the electoral programs of SNS contain, to a certain extent, protectionist statements aimed at protecting the national rights and sovereignty of Slovakia within the EU. Based on the ratio of positive and negative statements, the manifesto of 2006 can be perceived as the most pro-European program, but the overall ratio of the European statements in this program is low — only 9 %. The program primarily deals with other issues as it is merely nationalistic and denies the participation of the Hungarian minority in state governance. It advocates, however, the strengthening the Slovak Republic's orientation towards the EU, while preserving the sovereignty of the country and refusing to pass on other competences to the European Union (Program of SNS 2006). In the shorter document of 2010, SNS does not change its rhetoric towards the EU. Four negative statements were identified in the selected areas, with the number of statements relating to the EU even decreasing by 20 statements. Significant protectionism can also be found in the requirement for the creation of a second chamber of the European Parliament, in which national member states should have the right of veto. They would be able to

block the adoption of important European legislation. Positive statements towards the EU include support of the Lisbon Treaty, which the party helped to ratify from the position of the governmental party. Furthermore, it also supported the creation of the European Armed Forces and European diplomacy. The party also, however, criticized the adoption of the Euro currency in particular. Through its adoption, in their opinion, Slovakia lost the possibility of influencing social and economic development in the country. (SNS, 2010)

The electoral document from 2012 is even shorter and contains 24 % of the EU related statements. It is rated, however, as the most Eurosceptic manifesto among all the examined programs, as the negative statements highly outweigh the positive ones in a 14 to 6 ratio. The party is expressing itself very skeptically primarily about the European Stabilization Mechanism (ESM), which they referred to as "the fake rescue of economically irresponsible countries." According to SNS, they should be excluded from the Eurozone. They are also highly critical of the overall functioning of the EU as they consider the EU to be 'bureaucratic machinery' and call for fundamental reforms of the EU. The party disagrees with the steps of the European leadership and believes they are trying to create a European superstate, which they radically reject. SNS also thinks that European legislation extends to areas where sovereignty is guaranteed by the Slovak Constitution (SNS 2012). Although the degree of Europeanization of the manifesto is higher than in previous documents, it is clearly the most Eurosceptic party document from a qualitative point of view.

The electoral manifesto of 2016 is more comprehensive. Although the large proportion of negative outcomes towards the EU declined, the overall rate of Europeanization dropped significantly to 5.3 %. The party in the program calls for certain competencies to be brought back to the member states, which completely denies the principles ratified by the Lisbon Treaty. Even after the change in the chairman, SNS has retained protectionist rhetoric, but does not express its attitude as radical (SNS 2016).

The Most-Híd party participated for the first time in the parliamentary elections in 2010 and entered the government coalition for a short time. The party can be described as clearly pro-European, as negative statements towards the EU do not appear in any of the programs that were analyzed. Although the overall rate of European statements is not high, only 9 %, this can be attributed to a larger document. More than a third of these statements relate to the use of EU funds. Most-Híd appeals for better use to be made of all the economic benefits that EU membership provides. It places a great emphasis on Schengen membership as well as on the Eurozone. Generally speaking, Most-Hid actively supports the program in all the main European policies, and it perceives the EU as the natural space where Slovakia naturally belongs (Most-Híd 2009).

The 2012 election document is much shorter, with the party emphasizing that program priorities are not changing. The entry of Slovakia into the EU and into the euro area is perceived as the most positive moment of the country's modern history. There is an appeal for the need to maintain reasonable and credible steps even during the period when the EU is in crisis. Thus, the party clearly calls for the adoption of the ESM. Even if the degree of Europeanization of the program dropped to 7 %, the document could be perceived as clearly pro-European and deepening integration supporting (Most-Híd 2012).

The party did not come up with an electoral document for the 2016 election, but with a comprehensive strategy document entitled *'Civil Vision'* containing about 400 recommendations across various areas. In terms of the percentage expression of the European statement, the program contains even less references to the EU, but is clearly pro-European. The lower 6 percent rate of Europeanization is due to the large scope of the document. The number, however, of European statements has increased. They are committed to strengthening the European Union's position as well as moving Slovakia from the periphery to the core of the EU (Most-Híd 2016). Similarly to other parties, Europeanization had a considerable effect on Most-Híd manifestos.

2. Changing the organizational structure of political parties

This part analyzes changes in the organizational structure of selected parties that have been reflected since Slovakia joined the EU. There was a focus on whether positions and sections were created in the parties for people dealing with EU affairs. This was based on research of party documents to determine what position 'Eurospecialists' have in the party and whether they have an impact on creating party politics. The methodological examination is based on content analysis of documents and interviews with party specialists on European affairs.

'Euro Specialists,' according to Carter, Luther, and Pognutke (2007), can be defined generally as a heterogeneous group of political actors who differ in the fact that a substantial part of their political agenda is linked to the EU's activities, policies and processes related to European governance. The first group of 'Euro Specialists' are MEPs, whose position development within the national party is an interesting subject for research, because every European treaty has increased the strength of the European Parliament and its competencies. The second group consists of politicians or party employees who are covering the European agenda at a national level: the Minister for European Affairs, the spokesperson for the European affairs, a member of the European Affairs Committee, etc.

The statutes of SMER-SD (2016) do not regulate the status of Eurospecialists, do not mention any sections and even do not regulate the position of MEPs in the party. An interesting example from the MEPs would be Monika Beňová, who has been a member of the European Parliament since the first parliamentary term. In terms of party structures, she held the post of Deputy Chair in 2000–2006 (European Parliament 2018). Also worthy of mention is the MEP Vladimír Maňka, who is also a member of the party presidency (SMER-SD 2018) and former MEP Katarína Neveďalová who currently works as the international secretary of SMER-SD (SMER-SD 2018), she is also a Vice-Chairwoman of PES since 2012 (TASR 2015a).

The Europeanization changes within the structure of the party were helped clarify by the SMER-SD MP Ľuboš Blaha who is chair of the European Affairs Committee. From the point of view of party structures, the party did not experience significant changes over time. Since its establishment, it has its own international department, but expertise in European affairs is very weak. Blaha explains this fact by arguing that since 2006 SMER-SD has been a governmental party for 10 years, and therefore all of the European agenda is addressed through the government's foreign ministry (Blaha 2018). The European policy agenda was largely addressed by the former Prime Minister Robert Fico, who consulted in particular the Foreign Affairs Minister and individual MEPs and specialists. Their power in the party is, however, very weak, which stems mainly from personal disputes between individuals. When establishing policies and programs, the party uses executive lists of advisors. MEP Vladimír Maňka stated that the party often cooperates with external experts on European issues (Maňka 2018).

The Slovak National Party does not regulate the position of MEPs or other Eurospecialists in their statutes either. The most significant, most influential party Eurospecialist is Jaroslav Paška, a former MEP, with whom a semi-structured interview was conducted for the needs of the analysis. Since 2015, he has been the first Vice-chair of the party and is considered a very important representative of the party that has an impact on determining the party program direction (Paška 2018). Paška has been thus far the only MEP elected and is also a candidate for the 2019 elections. The euroscepticsm of the party is also demonstrated by the fact that Paška was a member of the EP faction called Europe of Freedom and Democracy, established by the British Eurosceptic Nigel Farage (European Parliament 2014). It is unclear whether the number of Eurospecialists or sections of the European agenda will increase over time. According to Paška, the party handles European policy and program within a professional club, which is made up of experts from the party or the external environment. They are mostly diplomats or experienced specialists who have worked in European structures. The European agenda is difficult to solve professionally and thus this expert club meets when necessary. The position of the MEP is positively perceived within the party as he is considered a mediator between the EU and national party

politics (Paška 2018). In this sense the impact of Europeanization is to a certain degree limited but for different reasons than in the case of SMER-SD.

Unlike the two previous parties, Most-Hid regulates the position of MEPs directly in the statutes. The MEP, after being elected, automatically becomes a member of the Republic's Council of the Party which is the central operating authority of the party (Most-Híd 2016). There is an emphasis on the strong position of the MEP as Eurospecialist. The member of the Bureau of the Most-Híd is the only MEP of the Party József Nagy, who was elected in 2014 (TASR 2014). The MEP Jószef Nagy was interviewed and explained that the Most-Híd party has its own specialized *ad hoc* cabinet, which meets when needed. The party currently has a working group dealing with foreign policy. MEP Nagy has a significant impact on the agenda setting and helps increase interest in European politics among his party colleagues (Nagy 2018).

3. Patterns of party competition

The accession of Slovakia to the European Union represented a significant qualitative change of the environment in which political parties operated. According to Ladrech (2009), one of the essential levels of exploring the political party's Europeanization is to address important issues linked to the EU for the purposes of the electoral contest. On the basis of a previous analysis of the electoral programs of selected political parties for elections to the Parliament, it can be argued with certainty that the European issues have gradually become present in the party competition. None of the three selected parties is a so-called single-issue party, because their main rhetoric is not related to the EU exclusively. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify clearly pro-European parties as well as parties that reject some of its policies or call for their extensive reform. It can be argued that the attitude of the party towards the EU is very important to the parties in their pre-election struggle. The question, however, is whether the parties are ideological–continually standing for their conviction or strategic–changing their attitudes towards the EU based on the actual discourse of their electorate. The individual programs for the election of the parliamentary committee, as well as the views of the main representatives of the parties on the selected topics, were analyzed. An emphasis was also placed on the existence of possible party statements or fractions related to European integration. The views of the parties and their main representatives on the themes were analyzed: the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe, the Treaty of Lisbon, the accession to the EU Monetary Union, the adoption of ESM and the Migration Crisis.

Since its establishment in 1999, SMER-SD has always been consistent in pro-European attitudes. A change occurred only with the Migration Crisis (Borárosová and Filipec 2017: 69). According to Ľuboš Blaha, the party is clearly pro-European

and has always been. When setting up European positions, the party cooperates with European diplomats and consultants who work or worked within the 'Western structures' and are extremely pro-European. The party leadership itself is, according to Blaha, composed of many modern pro-European politicians such as Prime Minister Pellegrini or Peter Kažimir. It could be said that there are two wings in the party — one made of the so-called 'central-right modernists' and, on the other hand, a Eurosceptical wing formed predominantly from the party's parliamentary club. In terms of the party's strategic behavior in the context of the election, Blaha stressed that it depends on the specific topic. In common European issues the party proceeds in the sense of pro-European national interests. Other more publicized topics such as the migration crisis, sanctions against Russians, and others are evaluated according to the electoral map. This means that the preference of the party's voters decides on the party positions.

SMER-SD was positive about both the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe and the Treaty of Lisbon. The party MPs voted for both of them. Robert Fico campaigned to obtain the necessary constitutional majority because there was a threat that the treaty would not pass. After signing the contract, Fico stated that he would resign as Prime Minister in case of failure (Hospodárske noviny 2018). The electoral program of 2010 and 2012 more than once refers to the significant shift that the Lisbon Treaty meant for Slovakia (SMER-SD election program, 2010; 2012).

SMER-SD as a governmental party also helped to ratify the accession to the Eurozone, which they considered a significant and important step for Slovakia. The party had already expressed its support for the adoption of the currency and the need to take all necessary steps to enter the euro area in its 2006 election program (SMER-SD 2006). The party perceived adopting the Euro currency as a strategic goal that would help improve the living standards of Slovak citizens (SMER-SD 2010). It can be argued that the party has been highly consistent in the topic of entry into the euro area, thus its attitude may be perceived as ideological.

During the first round of voting for the ESM, SMER-SD refused to vote purely tactically. They then won the early elections, after which they were able to from the government on their won. Robert Fico has publicly expressed his conviction about the need to accept the ESM, and after the early elections, they unambiguously supported and adopted this treaty by 118 MPs, of which 83 belonged to SMER-SD (Foreign Policy Yearbook 2012). The migration crisis is a topic that divided the Slovak party spectrum into two camps. This is the most significant topic that SMER-SD has taken strategic positions on. The official attitudes of the party radically rejected the European law about migration quotas. The legislation was termed irrational and inadmissible (Government Office of the SR 2015) Prime Minister Fico went even further when he took action in the European Court of Justice on this matter.

The SNS may be perceived in its program priorities towards the EU as, in contrast, a Eurosceptic party, which rejects several common European policies or treaties. Even after the change in the post of party chair, the party did not necessarily become more benevolent towards the EU. According to Jaroslav Paška, the new chair Andrej Danko made the party begin to become more aware of the need for a balanced view of the EU, determining what is beneficial for Slovakia and what is not. The party rejects several European policies because of interference with national sovereignty and refuses to give up to the EU those competencies that the country can manage itself (Paška 2018). Despite the continuity in the protectionist views the Party maintains, it is important to state that the new chair Andrej Danko is more conciliatory towards the EU and his speech is not particularly radical.

The party had very negative attitudes towards the Treaty, establishing a Constitution for Europe, which they perceived as a major interference in the sovereignty of the country (SME 2005). In the electoral manifesto of 2006, they rejected the treaty and in case of its ratification expressed a request for holding a referendum (SME 2006). After the elections, the party maintained an unchanged opinion and its attitude can therefore be viewed as ideological. In the case of the Treaty of Lisbon, which has largely taken over a number of regulations of an unsuccessful Treaty on a Constitution for Europe, SNS did not take a negative view. There is no reference in the electoral program regarding the treaty. Moreover, during the period of its ratification, SNS was a governmental party that voted for its adoption (NR SR 2008). President Ján Slota stated before the vote that the party would respect the will of the Slovak people in the referendum when they voted to join the EU (Hospodárske noviny 2008). Despite this rather positive attitude, it cannot be said that SNS would proceed strategically on this topic. They were pushed to vote for 'yes' by its pro-European coalition partner. In the case of the Slovak Republic's entry into the Eurozone, SNS has always had skeptical opinions, whether in the electoral program (2006), or just before voting in which, as a government party, they supported adopting the euro. Ján Slota was not convinced about the readiness of the country to adopt the single currency and even publicly regretted in 2011 that he had voted for joining the Eurozone. He also expressed the conviction that it was a matter of time when it would collapse (Aktuality 2011). Party members had a very negative opinion mainly about the ESM, which was radically rejected. Its members unanimously expressed the belief that it would sustain several generations of Slovaks in debt. Jozef Augustín, chair of the Foreign Expert Club of the party, even said in this context that SNS is considering leaving the Eurozone or even the EU (Euractiv 2012). Even in the case of the refugee crisis and the proposal for the adoption of legislation on the reallocation of migrants, the party kept its opinion unchanged. They were strictly against admitting that most of them were economic migrants (TA SR 2015). The proposed

European changes, are according to Paška, an unacceptable interference with the sovereignty of the country (SNS 2016). The party can be generally evaluated in terms of reflecting European themes as an ideological party.

The attitudes of Most-Híd have remained unchanged since its establishment and are based on promotion of European integration, deepening and strengthening co-operation with European institutions and partners. At the time of the ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon, the party did not exist yet. Its current chair, however, together with many other future party members of Most-Híd were members of the small Party of the Hungarian Community (*Strana maďarskej komunity; SMK*). Béla Bugar was in favor of the Lisbon Treaty (SME 2008) and generally speaking the Treaty of Lisbon was perceived by the party members as a good step for Slovakia, as high-lighted in all the electoral programs. Similarly, when the Slovak Republic joined the Eurozone the party as such did not exist yet, but in the following years Most-Híd was positive about the euro, considering is the most positive step in the modern history of Slovakia (Most-Híd election program 2012). There is no doubt in both cases about the ideological positions of the party. Most-Híd can be identified as a clear supporter of the ESM, as they invested a great deal of effort into trying to adopt the treaty, with all its deputies voting for its adoption (NR SR 2011). Most-Híd has not changed its attitude over the years and continues to call for solidarity among EU members. Similarly, in the case of the migration crisis, Most-Híd's opinion was the most moderate, with Béla Bugár calling for solidarity with migrants and European partners. He urged citizens to help migrants and expressed the conviction that the Slovak Republic had the capacity to accept 800 migrants (Most-Híd 2015). The party did not change its attitudes even after becoming part of the government and partly even criticized the action brought in this matter by Robert Fico to the European Court of Justice (Pravda 2017). Most-Híd is the most pro-European in this sense out of the three analyzed parties.

4. The party vs. the government relation

Changes in the attitudes of individual parties towards the EU were analyzed in the period when they were part of the government. It has been examined whether the government position did not cause the positive rhetoric change towards the EU. For the purpose of the survey, areas similar to those used for the above-mentioned level were selected. The analysis of party program and government program documents, supplemented by official views of party representatives, was complemented by the answers of party specialists dealing with EU affairs.

SMER-SD is the most interesting object of exploration in this examination level, since it has been the political party forming the government for the longest period

of time in the modern history of Slovakia. The first government was created with the People's Party — Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (*Ľudová strana — Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko; ĽS-HZDS*) and SNS after the 2006 elections, with a clear predominance. It can therefore be deduced that SMER-SD had the main word when compiling the government's program document. The program is clearly pro-European, and one of the first sentences refers to the need to enter the Eurozone. The government has committed itself to take all necessary steps to ensure this goal (Government Program 2006). It can be argued that the government continued to pursue its pre-election goals and did not change its positions at all. The government also expressed its support for a continuation of the ratification process of the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe (Government Program 2006). The party later clearly expressed its support for the adoption of the Treaty of Lisbon and helped to ratify the treaty in Parliament.

In 2012, after the early parliamentary elections, SMER-SD won with a large difference and created a government without the need to invite any partners. The electoral programs for the 2010 and 2012 elections were clearly pro-European. It can be argued that by participating in the government in 2006–2010 the party began to reflect EU-related issues even more. This fact was confirmed by Ľuboš Blaha who pointed to Ernst Haas according to whom the environment we live in shapes us and we adapt to its identity. He admitted that in the discussions at the European level, where the constructive debate took place, each participant shaped and changed his mind. The government was forced to act pragmatically, and this means pro-European, because the European economy is important for Slovakia (Blaha 2018). The SMER-SD government program document was pro-European, containing several references to the positive impact of the adoption of the Treaty of Lisbon and committing itself to respecting it. The document even directly supported the earliest possible adoption of the European Stability Mechanism (Government Statement 2012).

SMER-SD also created the government in 2016, but this time had to invite coalition partners: SNS and Most-Híd. At the end of the previous parliamentary term, the party strongly criticized migration redistribution quotas and had a strongly negative attitude towards the migration crisis as such. The strong rhetoric might be attributed, however, to their strategy in the election competition as the anti-immigration statements were not placed in the government's program document. The document mentions the need to adopt measures that would help better protect the external border and contribute to resolving the crisis while respecting the specifics of the EU Member States (Government Program 2016). Although President Fico generally expressed himself in some cases as Islamophobic and anti-immigrant, his speech in the European Parliament was quite moderate. He also called for finding a common constructive solution to the crisis aimed at removing the causes of migration and ensuring better Schengen functionality (Fico 2016).

In contrast to SMERS-SD, SNS has been always critical and protectionist towards the EU in its programs as well as in the public statements of its representatives. After joining the government with SMER-SD and ĽS-HZDS, it began to have more moderate rhetoric between 2006 and 2010 and even voted for the adoption of many European policies and treaties. The government program is clearly pro-European, but SNS did not have the same word as it occupied only three chairs in the government. Against the backdrop of the Treaty of Lisbon, the party did not speak out negatively and advocated pro-European positions, stating that such a development was completely natural (SME 2008). With the Treaty of Lisbon, the party did not speak out negatively and advocated pro-European positions, arguing that such a development was completely natural (SME 2008). The party also voted in favor of the adoption of the Euro, although it doubted the preparedness of the Slovak Republic. SNS criticized the adoption of the Euro, however, in 2011. The criticism was rather symbolic as the party was limited by its coalition partners in its public statements. Its participation in the government, in contrast, did not change its actual attitude towards the EU. The government program of 2016 is also pro-European and the chair Andrej Danko holds the position of President of Parliament. Despite the fact that the party's public statements on the EU, after accession to the government, are not radical and reluctant, Paška has confirmed that the party continues to stand on its positions of protecting sovereignty. The party specifically rejects interference within the sovereignty of the national migration and asylum policy. Participating in government, in his words, has shifted the party positions to a positive view on the EU in some topics, but has grown even more skeptical in some themes (Paška 2018).

Despite the fact that the party's election programs do not show a high degree of Europeanization, Most-Híd is clearly the most pro-European party which supports all the main EU-related issues. Most-Híd was part of the government in 2010–2012 and has also been taking part in the current government since 2016. Both government programs were clearly pro-European. The party did not agree with the quota system for redistributing migrants, but was the only party calling for helping migrants. MEP Nagy does not think that taking part in the government for the party meant a change of position towards the EU. On the contrary, he argues that they have always been limited in pursuing European politics by their coalition partners (Nagy 2018). As a result, Most-Híd contributed to strengthening the pro-European element within the coalition.

5. Party relations beyond the national party system

The nature of party relations outside the national party system is the last and no less important level which determines the character of its Europeanization. The

relationship of selected parties with transnational European political parties was analyzed. For the purposes of examining this area, the party documents were analyzed and the most important source of information were the answers of party 'Eurospecialists' who were interviewed.

SMER-SD became a full member of the European Socialist Party in May 2005, referring to PES program values at the beginning of party statutes (Statutes of SMER-SD 2016). Relations, however, between the parties began to deteriorate. The first important moment was the suspension of the SMER-SD membership in the PES because of their partnership in the government coalition with SNS. At the time, it was considered a nationalist and xenophobic party, and the alliance with such a partner went against the statutes of PES. The PES leadership voted for a 10-month suspension of SMER-SD membership in 2006 (Poláková 2006). Robert Fico did not agree, however, with the verdict and insisted that his government is social-democratic (Pravda 2006). Membership was resumed when the Congress of the party voted for it in 2009. Fico later stated that he would never let anybody push him into taking action or not allowing him to negotiate with some partner (SME 2009). The party was also threatened by exclusion from PES because of Fico's anti-immigration statements towards Muslims (Press Department: SMER-SD 2015). It can be stated that the relationship between SMER-SD and PES has been marked by mutual accusations and distrust for many years. According to Blaha, this is one of the reasons why SMER-SD does not follow the PES program when establishing policy. The reason for the weak cooperation between SMER-SD and other member parties from PES is their ideological difference. The influence of MEPs on party politics is extremely small (Blaha 2018).

SNS is not and has never been a member of any of the European political parties. After the accession of the Slovak Republic to the EU, the party had just one MEP who joined the Eurosceptic Europe of Freedom and Democracy (EFD) faction. The members of the faction had in common criticism of EU development, which, according to them, is aimed at creating a superstate. The faction refused to pass further competencies on to the EU (EFD 2014). Jaroslav Paška was even the deputy chair of this parliamentary faction. The fracture did not affect, however, the activities of SNS, and instead aimed at creating international partnerships between the parties that could join a coalition in voting for protecting national sovereignty. He perceived himself as a mediator between European and national politics (Paška 2018).

Most-Hid became a full member of the European People's Party in 2013 and expressed its determination to cooperate as much as possible with the party and obtain as many MEPs elected as possible (Most-Híd 2013). Representatives of the Most-Híd party regularly took part in EPP conferences. Béla Bugar met with EPP President Joseph Daul in 2015 and they discussed the Most-Híd party program and possible post-election cooperation (TASR 2015b). Membership in the strongest

European party Most-Híd is perceived extremely positively. Most-Híd even aligns its national program with the EPP program. According to Jósef Nagy, membership in the EPP is very beneficial not only for the party itself, but for the entire country (Nagy 2018). Most-Híd thus represents a less problematic example of cooperation between the European and national level of the political parties.

Conclusion

The main aim of this article was to analyze the impact of the EU dimension on three selected political parties in Slovakia within the concept of Europeanization of political parties as developed by Robert Ladrech (2009). For the purposes of analysis, three political parties: Smer — Social Democracy, the Slovak National Party and Most-Híd party were analyzed in five areas involving programmatic change, organizational change, patterns of party competition, party-government relations and the relations beyond the national party system.

The European element is present in the programs of all three parties and increased in importance over time. The scope dedicated, however, to EU affairs and the European dimension varies. While in the case of SMER-SD the scope increased in recent years from about 9.4 % in 2006 to approx. 19 % in 2016, the EU element in the SNS program remained relatively stable around 9 %. In the case of Most-Híd, however, the scope fell to approximately 7 %, although contrary to SNS the program of Most-Híd is clearly pro-European and may also be labelled as more pro-European than in the case of Smer-SD.

Regarding organization change, there is a considerable difference among the parties. Due to its long-term presence in the government, SMER-SD was not encouraged or pushed towards the creation of an internal party structure dealing with EU issues. The party merely relied on official state offices chaired by party members. Although the statute of the party does not regulate the status of Eurospecialists, the party due to electoral success has had several influential people (Vladimír Maňka, Katarina Neveďalová, Ľuboš Blaha) who are familiar with the agenda or use the list of external experts. SNS also does not regulate the position of MEPs or Eurospecialists and thus instead relies on individuals, such as Jaroslav Paška, as he has been thus far the only MEP elected and is also a candidate for the 2019 elections. In contrast to the two previous parties, Most-Híd regulates the position of MEPs directly in the statutes — the MEP, after being elected automatically, becomes a member of the Republic's Council of the party which emphasises the strong position of the MEPs as Eurospecialist (József Nagy). EU issues are also debated in a specialized ad hoc cabinet, which meets according to party needs.

All three analyzed parties are members of the government which has had some impact on their EU agenda and communication. Most important is the role of SMER-SD which is perceived as the leading party of the coalition. The party as a leader has an evident pro-European attitude, which changed slightly, however, in selected issues including the migration crisis. The positive attitude of SMER-SD was also partially shadowed by the anti-Islamic statements of Robert Fico. As mentioned by Blaha, however, SMER-SD is not homogenous and there is also an important Eurosceptic wing present. In general, a more Eurosceptic attitude is associated with SNS which, due to its presence in a coalition with two much more pro-European parties, had to limit its attitude towards EU issues and plays a rather symbolic critical voice highlighting the issues of national sovereignty. It is also important to note that the current attitude of the party is influenced by the new chair Andrej Danko, who acts more conciliatory towards the EU. The attitudes of Most-Híd have remained unchanged since its establishment and continue to be very pro-European, partially thanks to Béla Bugár who also openly called for helping refugees. In this sense Most-Híd criticized the other parties in the coalition.

The above-mentioned attitude is also valid for party-government relations. All three parties are members of the same government which significantly limits their approaches. While the government program is generally pro-European, Smer-SD and Most-Híd in particular had to limit (or completely switch) its attitude towards the EU in relation to the migration crisis and introduce a critical attitude *vis-á-vis* the coalition partner from SNS or the opposition in the Parliament. This maneuver might be understand, however, as a tactical step rather than changes in the long-term party profiles.

Europeanization also had its impact on party relations beyond the national level. Most-Híd plays a non-problematic role among all three parties and found its place within the European People's Party. Moreover, there are attempts at cooperation regarding ideological and program issues. In contrast to Most-Híd, SNS is not and has never been a member of any of the European political parties. Historically, the party had only one MEP who joined the Eurosceptic Europe of Freedom and Democracy (EFD) faction where Jaroslav Paška even become the deputy chair who also played the role of moderator between the national and European level. There were no significant top-down influences, however, on SNS. This is not the case, in contrast, with SMER-SD which became a full member of the Party of European Socialists in May 2005. Relations between the subjects deteriorated, however, due to coalition with SNS which was perceived as nationalist and xenophobic. Nevertheless, as of 2009 relations between both subjects were normalized and SMER-SD played an important role within PES. Relations worsened as of 2015 due to controversial statements by Robert Fico. Despite the merely non-problematic cooperation, the

influence on the European level on a national party level is small as is the role of MEPs on national policy.

Note

[1] This is, however, a partly arbitrary decision, which helps identify the attitude.

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